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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000800

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [IS](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#)  
SUBJECT: 1,500 ISRAELIS ATTEND MAY 12 DEMONSTRATION AT  
EVACUATED HOMESH SETTLEMENT

REF: 08 JERUSALEM 793

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. Around 1,500 Israelis, including busloads from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem as well as West Bank settlers, attended a May 12 demonstration at the evacuated settlement of Homesh. The northern West Bank settler council and several settler organizations are lobbying for Homesh to be reestablished, and have brought dozens of Israeli MKs to visit the site since the new Israeli government took office. Settler leaders are lobbying Israeli PM Netanyahu to defend settlement construction in his May 18 meeting with President Obama. The Israeli Minister of Interior, Strategic Affairs, and Information publicly supported the May 12 demonstration. End summary.

IDF Allowed Demonstration on "Closed Military Zone"

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¶2. (C) The head of the northern West Bank settlers' international liaison office, David Haivri, told Poloff on May 13 that around 1,500 Israelis, including five Knesset members, peacefully demonstrated on May 12 at the site of the evacuated Homesh settlement, a "closed military zone" since its evacuation in summer 2005. Haivri said the IDF allowed the settler council and settler organizations "Homesh First" and "Shomron Settlers' Committee" to bring busloads of participants from Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other cities as part of the "Lag B'Omer" holiday festivities. Haivri said a bonfire at the Homesh demonstration, which he claimed could be seen in Tel Aviv, was intended to remind Israelis of the "strategic importance" of the site, located on a hilltop within sight of Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Mount Hermon. According to Haivri, the demonstration was advertised in Israeli newspapers and on the internet, resulting in a "very nice turnout."

Settlers Lobbying Israeli MKs to Reestablish Settlement

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¶3. (C) Haivri said the demonstration was part of the northern West Bank settler council's lobbying efforts to gain GOI support for re-establishment of Homesh, which was evacuated during the disengagement in 2005. He claimed that the council has brought more than 40 Israeli MKs to the Homesh site and to a neighborhood in nearby Shavei Shomron settlement that houses many Homesh evacuees, known locally as "the neighborhood of the banished." Haivri said northern West Bank settler council chairman Gershon Mesika has lobbied Israeli ministers and MKs to push Israeli PM Netanyahu to defend settlement construction, including re-establishment of Homesh, in his May 18 meeting with President Obama.

¶4. (C) Haivri said the settlers' lobbying efforts include

maintaining a "24 hour presence" at Homesh. Around ten yeshiva students study there by day and several settlers serve as watchmen at night, though they "have to sneak on foot around the back roads" to reach to the site. Haivri said the IDF occasionally arrests settlers found penetrating the "closed military zone," but charges are always dropped expeditiously, since "the military is aware that we are there daily."

Israeli Ministers and MKs Voice Support for Demonstration  
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15. (U) Israeli press reported that former Homesh settlers at the demonstration read letters from cabinet members, including Interior Minister and Shas Chairman Eli Yishai, Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Yaalon, and Minister of Information Yuli Edelstein. Yishai wrote, "I am certain that we will succeed in rebuilding Homesh." Yaalon wrote, "I want to bless the participants and support them in the realization of the Zionist way." Edelstein added, "I have the utmost respect for the (former) Homesh settlers and all those who work as part of the settlement enterprise." In addition, press reported that National Union MKs Uri Ariel, Arie Eldad, and Michael Ben Ari, Likud MK Danny Anon, and Shas MK Chaim Amsalem attended the demonstration.

16. (U) Note: Edelstein, Ariel, Eldad, and Ben Ari all live in West Bank settlements. Edelstein, a Likud member and immigrant from the former Soviet Union, served as Minister of Immigrant Absorption in Netanyahu's previous government. End note.

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WALLES